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AUTHOR Pinkerton, James R.; Brown, Ralph B.
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ABSTRACT

This study uses a comparative analysis of 17 northwest Missouri communities to determine the relationship between viability of rural communities and: (1) leadership patterns; (2) specific aspects of community development organizations; and (3) community organizing strategies. Populations of the communities range from 1,000 to 2,500. Based on such measures as population change, sales tax revenue, and high school enrollment change, an index of viability was constructed for each of the 17 communities, and the communities were ranked based on this score. Communities at the extremes in the array of viability were selected as sites for a comparative analysis of leadership characteristics and network patterns. Informed people in the communities listed leaders in 19 categories. Leaders were rated and top scorers were interviewed. Membership on community development boards was associated with community viability. All leaders had significant external social networks, but the size of a leader's internal network with other leaders in the community was positively associated with high viability. No support was found for the hypothesis that community development organizations achieve greater community viability by recruiting specific occupational groups for officers and directors; however, bankers and news related professions were found to play a key role in community viability. In a particular small viable community, it was found that mobilization and community action took place through leaders of key business organizations, and community-wide support was sought only after an issue was addressed and sanctioned by these influential people. (KS)

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RURAL COMMUNITY VIABILITY AND LEADERSHIP PATTERNS

James R. Pinkerton and Ralph B. Brown

Department of Rural Sociology,
University of Missouri-Columbia

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Rural Community Viability and Leadership Patterns

James R. Pinkerton and Ralph B. Brown

Department of Rural Sociology,
University of Missouri-Columbia

INTRODUCTION

An extensive literature has been developed around the economic and social crises currently facing small rural communities. Conspicuously absent from this literature are systematic comparative studies of why some rural communities are more effective than others in developing strategies for dealing with the problems they face (see, e.g., USDA, 1988:vii). Of particular importance is the need to understand why communities with apparently similar economic and ecological constraints (and opportunities) show considerable variation in their ability to cope with these crises. The use of objective criteria gathered for a specific population of communities of similar size, location and economies provides a useful comparative base for assessing differences between these communities.

Rational Behind The Project and Selection of Communities

Our goal is to determine the relationship between

viability of rural communities and 1) leadership patterns, 2) specific aspects of community development organizations, and 3) community organizing strategies. Our approach is a comparative analysis of communities within a socio-geographical field. The field consists of 17 northwest Missouri counties. This is an area of family farms and some light manufacturing. The largest place in the area is about 13,000 population. Within these counties, all incorporated places with populations between 1,000 and 2,500 are included in the study. There are seventeen (17) communities of this size.

The common field provides some degree of control of the socio-economic environment. Settlement patterns, political structures, and economies are similar. In addition, in our selection of communities for leadership pattern analysis, a more precise control on population size is imposed. However, we do not claim identity among the communities in the specifics of services, employment, ethnicity, service-hinterland relationships and other socio-economic factors. To the contrary, we seek to discover differences in communities that account for differences in viability.

Places of 1,000 to 2,500 population were selected because they typically have significant resources, have developed substantial infrastructures, and have traditionally been centers of rural communities[1].

[1] Supporting this judgement,- all 17 of the places selected in the study area have a high school and a weekly newspaper.

At the same time, communities in this size range appear to be especially vulnerable to the changes occurring in rural society. They struggle to maintain a viable economy and basic services as they compete with larger regional centers and with each other.

Our underlying hypothesis is that human actors, as they interact and organize, affect outcomes--in this case, the viability of their communities (Logan and Molotch 1987; Ballard, et al. 1981). We, of course, are aware that extra-local factors influence community destinies, but we also contend that communities, through their actors, affect outcomes. Our efforts in the studies discussed are directed toward identifying differences in specific social relationships in more and less viable communities in the study area.

We define a viable community to be one which "preserves a degree of local control and responds to the needs of community members, while relating effectively to institutions of the larger society" (Hassinger et al. 1988:162). A viable community should provide basic everyday services in the areas of education, finance (i.e., banking), communications, health (primary health services), and basic consumer goods (food, hardware, clothing). It should also maintain a stable or growing population base.

To analyize rural community viability and the specific roles of community leaders in these 17 communities, a

measure of viability that could be used to assess differences between communities had to be developed. Using objective criteria, an index of viability for each of the 17 communities was constructed. The selection of items for the index was based on correspondence to the conceptual definition of viability, as well as the quality and availability of data. County level data were ruled out because several counties had more than one of the 17 communities within them. Furthermore, county data probably are not appropriate for community analysis. Saenz and Colberg (1988:339) found that the communities they studied and the surrounding areas (the remainder of the counties) were "substantially different with regard to their sustenance activities." Only limited use was made of census data because at the time the research was undertaken, the data were almost a decade old.

Five indicators of community viability were used: 1) percent change in population from 1970 t0 1980; 2) percent change in high school enrollment from 1977/78 to 1987/88; 3) per capita sales tax receipts for the year 1987; 4) a business service score based on the presence or absence of 8 selected businesses; and 5) a health service score based on the presence or absence of 7 selected health services. The 17 communities in the study were ranked on each of the indicators. The ranks on the five indicators were averaged for each community and the ranks of the averages were employed as each community's viability score (Table 1).

TABLE 1

Viability Scores of Seventeen Missouri Commmunities

Place	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7
Community- A	2	9	6	1	2	4.0	2
Community- B	17	11	16	13	6	12.6	17
Community- C	3	5	1	1	6	3.2	1
Community- D	8	7	8	1	6	6.0	5
Community- E	10	13	17	16	6	12.4	15/16
Community- F	12	4	15	1	3	7.0	7
Community- G	6	15	11	13	6	10.2	12
Community- H	5	6	2	7	1	4.2	3
Community- I	1	8	4	7	14	6.8	6
Community- J	4	17	3	17	17	11.6	14
Community- K	14	10	12	7	14	11.4	13
Community- L	13	2	5	13	3	7.2	8
Community- M	7	3	7	1	6	4.8	4
Community- N	11	16	14	7	14	12.4	15/16
Community- O	16	1	10	7	3	7.4	9
Community- P	9	12	13	7	6	9.4	11
Community- Q	15	14	9	1	6	9.0	10

Col 1 - Percent population change 1970-1980

Col 2 - Per capita sales tax revenue 1987

Col 3 - Percent change in high school enrollment (4 grades) school years 1977/78-1987/88

Col 4 - Retail business score (based on presence or 8 selected businesses)

Col 5 - Medical service score (based on presence or absence of 7 selected medical services)

Col 6 - Average rank, sum of the ranks divided by five

Col 7 - Community Viability Scores - ranks of the average ranks

Eight businesses were used for the business score; a point was given for each of the following businesses: bank, eating place, hardware store, clothing store, hotel/motel, drug store, farm machinery dealership, automobile dealership. It should be noted that the first two services did not discriminate among the communities because those services were present in all of them. The items were retained because the index might be useful in the future for places with simpler service patterns. The scores ranged from 2-8.

The health service scores were generated in the same way as the business service scores. The following health services were used: MD or DO in family or general practice; nursing home: ICF (Intermediate Care Facility); Dentist; 2 or more MDs or DOs; medical specialty other than family practice; hospital; nursing home: SNF (Skilled Nursing Care). All of the communities had the first health service; the scores ranged from 1 to 7.

Ranks of the communities on the several objective indicators are shown in Table 1. Communities with high average ranks (1 being the highest) are regarded as as more viable.

The Studies

To date, we have completed several analyses of the data drawn in various fashion from the basic seventeen

community viability design. The remainder of this paper will deal with a brief overview of the various studies completed and the findings from these studies.

Characteristics of Rural Community Leaders and Leadership Social Network Patterns

Methods

Communities at the extremes in the array of viability were selected as the sites for a comparative analysis of leadership characteristics and network patterns. A population control was imposed by selecting a high and a low viable community from communities in the size range 1,000 to 1,500 and a second set from 2,000 to 2,500. After the original selections, it was learned that a substantial development by an outside agribusiness was imminent in the 1,000 to 1,500 place of low viability. The decision was to retain the community in the study and add another in the same category. The design for the comparative analysis is shown in Figure 1.

The measure of community viability has not been validated. As we work in these communities, however, it appears that objective criteria did differentiate between communities of higher and lower viability.

We used a position-reputation method to select leaders (Trounstine and Christensen, 1982). The strategy was to obtain a comprehensive list of persons in each community who held positions in organizations, public offices or committees, and any other identifiers of potential

Figure 1

Design for Comparative Analysis

Population	High Viability	Low Viability
1,000 - 1,500	Winder Index Score = 5	Brian Index Score = 17 Price Index Score = 13
2,000 - 2,500	Gale Index Score = 1	Simon Index Score = 15

leadership. The list was to be inclusive, taking in persons in the hinterlands as well as the trade centers. A 13-page instrument was used to record the names using the following categories:

A. Civic and service clubs and similar organizations
B. Fraternal, social clubs, and veterans organizations
C. Senior citizens organizations
D. Recreation and youth organizations
E. City government
F. County government and state or national officials residing in the community
G. Schools and other educational institutions
H. Agriculture related positions
I. Financial organizations (banks, insurance, real estate, other)
J. Major businesses (non-retail and services)
K. Major retail and service businesses
L. Commmunity development Associations/Industrial development Boards. (complete roster of boards)
M. Newspaper and other media
N. Voluntary services, e.g., volunteer fire dept, volunteer ambulance service.
O. Health, welfare and eleemosynary organizations
P. Cultural organizations
Q. Churches and religious groups
R. Professionals in practice: physicians, lawyers, dentists, veterinarians, chiropractors, others

S. Persons of influence who do not hold offices or occupy positions in organizations we have identified

Informed people in the communities helped us with this exercise. In county seat communities, county extension personnel were especially helpful; they often had lists of organizations and their incumbent officers. This was a rather easy task; it is not difficult to find knowledgable people in places this size. The number of position-holders identified ranged from 125 in Brian to 187 in Simon (Winder 141, Price 168, Gale 180).

The next step was to have informants in each community select leaders. In each community, informants represented the following seven (7) areas: 1) senior citizen/community tradition, 2) business, 3) agriculture, 4) education, 5) newspaper, 6) government agencies and 7) religion. In each community, two of the informants were women. The informants were asked to identify 15 top leaders (persons who can get things done or who can stop things from getting done) from the assembled list of position-holders. From the 15 selections, informants identified the 5 most influential leaders, and then the next 5. The top 5 leaders were scored 3 points, the second 5, two points, the remaining 5, one point. The points awarded by the seven informants in each community were summed for position-holders and 15 persons with the highest scores were declared the leaders of the respective communities.

The substantive data for this study come from interviews with the leaders in the 5 communities. The interviews were from 1 1/2 to 2 hours in length; there were no refusals.

Characteristics of Leaders

Ranges of scores (top score possible was 21) qualifying persons as leaders were as follows: Brian, 5-15; Winder, 6-20; Price, 6-16; Simon, 4-16; Gale 4-18. The numbers of women identified as leaders were: Brian, 2; Winder 3; Price, 1; Simon, 0; Gale, 6. Only one of the women leaders was ranked in the top 5 by other leaders; in that case, she was ranked number one.

Ninety-five percent of the leaders were married, 3 percent widowed, one person divorced, and one person never married. Leaders ranged in age from 26 years to 87 years; the average age was 51 years, the median 46 years (See Table 2).

A majority of the leaders were born in their communities and have spent their entire life there. Seventy five percent of them are employed full-time and only 16 percent were retired. Leaders were overwhelmingly engaged in (or if retired, formaly engaged) in managerial and professional occupations, (55 percent) (See Table 2).

We found that though there are noticable differences among the communities in the demographic characteristics of the leaders, the differences are not systematically

TABLE 2

Profiles of Leaders in Five Rural Communities

	1,000-1,500 population			2,000-2,500 population		
	Less viable Brian (percent)	Less viable Price (percent)	More viable Winder (percent)	Less viable Simon (percent)	More viable Gale (percent)	Total (percent)
Age						
< 45	26.7	64.3	26.7	60.0	33.3	41.9
45-64	53.3	21.4	40.0	20.0	46.7	36.5
65+	20.0	14.3	33.3	20.0	20.0	21.6
Sex						
Male	86.7	93.3	80.0	100.0	60.0	84.0
Female	13.3	6.7	20.0	-	40.0	16.0
Education						
12 years or less	26.7	13.3	60.0	26.7	20.0	29.3
13-15	33.3	26.7	00.0	40.0	00.0	20.0
16+	40.0	60.0	40.0	33.3	80.0	50.6
Length of time in community						
less than 20 years	33.3	46.7	26.7	33.3	13.3	30.7
20-39	20.0	40.0	13.3	33.3	53.4	32.0
40+	46.7	13.3	60.0	33.3	33.3	37.3
Occupation						
Professional, Technical & Kindred	20.0	46.7	20.0	20.0	46.7	30.7
Managers, Owners & Administrators	53.3	40.0	73.3	60.0	46.7	54.7
Sales & Clerical	6.7	6.7	6.7	-	6.7	5.3
Farmer Owners/ Operators	13.3	6.7	-	20.0	-	8.0
Homemaker	6.7	-	-	-	-	1.3
Unemployed	-	-	6.7	6.7	-	2.7
Marital Status						
Married	93.3	93.3	93.3	100.0	93.3	94.7
Divorce/Separated	-	6.7	-	-	-	1.3
Widow	-	-	6.7	-	6.7	2.7
Never Married	6.7	-	-	-	-	1.3

related to the level of viability of the communities (See Table 2). However, membership on community development boards was associated with community viability for both size communities. On average, leaders were members of almost five voluntary associations, not including community development boards.

Leadership Networks

The next step in looking at the leaders in these communities was to examine their interpersonal relationships and networks with each other. A common theme to rural development efforts is the establishment of outside linkages or "bridges" to resources only available in the larger society. Much discussion has concentrated on the ability of small towns to mobilize resources in times of crisis and to maintain a viable infrastructure. A popular notion is that rural people are isolated from the larger society's resources of finances, information, etc. Failure to tap into these resources is a major contributor to rural community decline.

Because the 5 communities were chosen as deliberate polar etremes from the viability scale with a control for size, the study design greatly facilitated an ANOVA procedure for data analysis. The analysis consisted of an examination of the social networks of each of the leaders in the 5 selected communities. Preliminary analysis had shown that leaders in each of the communities had

comparable external linkages to people outside of the community itself when asked where they would go for information. In fact we were surprised by the extent to which leaders in all of the communities had created substantial linkages to the outside. We think our surprise stemmed from the fact that we had all been well versed in the isolated rural community thesis. Therefore, our primary interest shifted to see if (through ANOVA) we could account for the differences in viability by how well "connected" the leaders in each community were to each other, i.e., internal linkages as opposed to external.

We found that the most important overall finding was that the low and high viability communities differed dramatically in terms of how well their respective leaders related to one another. Size of leader's networks was positively associated with high viability regardless of community size. The more leaders in the community related with each other, the more viable was the community in our study. The analysis also showed that high viability was associated with leaders' participation with each other in voluntary organizations such as community development boards. A final finding indicated that dense kinship networks among leaders were more prevalent in the smaller sized communities.

Even though the difference in population between the small communities (1,000 to 1,500) and the large (2,000 to 2,500) ones was only 1,000 or so population, we found

substantial differences in type and complexity of networks and organizations between the two size categories, indicating that size is a very important variable that must be taken into consideration.

Policy Implications of the Findings

There are two important policy implications of the findings. First, and most important, it would appear that policy-makers should devote less resources to programs which focus on building bridges between local leaders and the outside and instead focus on working with, and perhaps enhancing the effectiveness of, the social networks of leaders within the community itself. Second, greater attention should be given to developing specific strategies for working with local leadership which take into account fundamental differences in the internal social organization of different size rural communities.

Occupational Representation on Community Development Organizations and Community Viability

The relationship between community development organizations and the communities they serve seems to be a straight-forward one, i.e., promote economic growth and stability in the community. The following study of the seventeen communities' community development organizations revealed that this relationship is not as straight forward as typically presumed. Because community development

organizations are voluntary organizations they do not comprise the primary occupational concern of their members and officers. In addition, there are no clear mandates or budgets through government or other agencies to help them fulfill their organizational mission. As a result, such organizations are forced to secure resources from various sources which are not built into the organization itself.

For all seventeen communities, we examined the primary occupation of each of the officers and directors of their community development organizations. The hypothesis was that there would be certain types of people recruited to these positions based on the types of resources they had access to through their occupations.

We first wanted to see if the occupational composition of each community's development organization would replicate itself in the same dimensions as the viability scale. In other words, would certain occupational make-ups of community development organizations be associated with high or low viability? We used a "Smallest Space Analysis" to replicate in graphic format any potential underlying dimension of viability in the occupational structure. We found considerable consistency. The high viability communities did line up on one side of the smallest space "map" while the low viability communities lined up on the other. It must be remembered that the only data entered into the analysis were the occupations of the various community development officers and directors.

A second latent dimension also manifest itself on the smallest space map. We found that the vertical dimension corresponded very closely with the type of community development organization each community had. There were three basic types identified: 1) County level organization, 2) Local level organization and 3) No organization. Those communities which had county level organizations tended to polarize on one side of the map while those with local level ones were on the other with the no organization communities (there were two such communities) somewhere near the middle.

Finally we used an asymetric measure of association (Lambda) to see which variables were better predictors of each other. The analysis revealed a pattern inconsistent with the theory that community development organizations achieve greater community viability by recruiting specific occupational groups for officers and directors. The inconsistancy resides in the finding that viability was a better predictor of occupational diversity than the reverse. The weaker finding (which supports the resource attainment theory) was that community development organizations with greater occupational diversity were found in the more viable communities. Local organizations also showed greater occupational diversity than did county organizations. These results suggest that for community viability, recruitment of specific occupational groups may fill more a maintainance function than a generating one.

In the analysis, two occupational groups were found to be significantly predicted by community viability: Bankers and News Related Profession. Despite the unaticipated direction of this relationship, these two occupations seem to play a key role in community viability, through control of two vital resources, money and information. Conversely, community development organizations that had a high number of retired people on them were highly correlated with less viable communities. Retired people may have little access to key resources other than time. Those communities that had county level community development organizations were also highly correlated with low viability.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that the creation of or intervention into community development organizations as a viability building strategy may be misplaced. This of course has strong implications toward more traditional community development strategies. Unfortunately, our analysis can not determine which structures or strategies are causally related to high viability, but it does clearly show that occupational representation does not predict community viability sufficiently. It also showed that the viability scale had a certain degree of validity as it was replicated very closely by the smallest space analysis.

Community Organization for Effective Community Action

Another study from the data gathered was an enthnographic analysis of the small viable community "Winder." The researcher was interested in how the community organized or acted to form the relatively large industrial base it presently has. Preliminary research had shown this community to be unique in its conception of itself. The citizens often spoke of how often and how efficiently the community "would come together in times of need."

Using theoretical sampling techniques (See Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the researcher followed leads given by informants in personal interviews with key "actors" in the establishment of the industrial base. The researcher reconstructed through personal accounts and documents the events which led up to the first industry's establishment in the community. Also, he examined the events which led to the formation of the community development corporation (CDC) in the community. The CDC had a major role in the development of the industrial base.

The researcher was interested in key events, historical events and personal actors which may have been unique to this community alone and its ability to establish a large industrial base when surrounding communities had failed to do so. He was also interested in the way the community

organized itself in terms of leaders, elites and decision makers and how these people interacted with the average citizen of the community.

There were many unique events which put "the right people in the right place at the right time." These, however, are not the most interesting findings in terms of a sociological analysis. The important findings were how the community organized itself and in turn mobilized its citizens and resources. These findings were more generalizable to other findings on organizations and resource mobilization in the current literature.

Three competing hypotheses of how a community acts were compared with the data gathered for Winder. A brief summary of the three hypotheses follows. 1) The community acts through formal and informal groups and networks of individuals towards a collective goal. Those communities which are more democratic in their access to community decisions and goals will be able to achieve higher levels of collective action. This approach approximates the interactional or field perspective of community as expoused by Luloff (1988). 2) The community acts through individuals pursuing their own personal or collective agendas' through weak-ties which create information and resource networks that can be exploited for collective action. This approach to community action and change approximates the ideas of Granovetter (1973). 3) The community acts through centralized networks made up of

organizational leaders connected by weak-ties. Organizers pursue agendas of personal or collective action at the community level by maximizing the resources they can extract from key people. This approach is congruent with the theoretical ideas of Marwell, et al.

It was found that in Winder, mobilization and community action appear to take place through leaders of key business organizations within the community and city government. Community-wide support in Winder is sought only after an issue has been addressed and sanctioned by these influential people. There are rational strategies and practices of community leaders in community mobilization and community action. For example, organization heads rarely changed, and if they did, they changed among the key individuals only, thus giving the community a long-term stability. The networks that these people had established did not have to be re-established every year when new people would fill the positions. Also, they had had considerable success in their various community projects over the years. The citizens of the community saw their leaders as being able to get things done, thus there was a sense or history of effective community action. This type of leadership organization however, is very non-democratic in terms of the average person having a say in community decisions. One person in fact said that in elected positions if an incumbent is going to quit, he does not announce it publicly, he simply

hand picks his successor to assure that "the right person was filling the job." From the ethnographic and document analysis, Winder closely approximates Marwell, et al. (1988). theoretical conception of what type(s) of networks facilitate community action.

The Winder case also shows how specific individuals as key actors became involved in the formation of an industrial base in the community. These people as well as the community as a whole were affected by larger macro events such as changes in agriculture and transportation as well as a flood in 1951. The examination of the roles played by individuals in the community addresses not only the over aggregation problems with other research on community action, but addresses the macro to micro relationship of a social theory of purposive action as well.

Communities do act. And in the case of Winder it appears to be through centralized networks of specific organizational leaders.

CONCLUSION

The data set from the seventeen rural communities has been a very rich one. The examples above show just a sample of some of the diverse and unique findings that have been drawn from these data to this date. We are

excited about the things we are finding and feel very confident about the analysis given the quality of the research design and the final data gathered.

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Appendix Figure 1.

Study Area and Location of Places 1,000 - 2,500 population (1980) in the study Area. ⊙ Indicates the 5 study sites